

# SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

60th Anniversary Issue

Autumn 2010

vol. 61, no. 4





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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

## *Fellowship In Prayer*

encourages and supports  
a spiritual orientation to life,

promotes the practice  
of prayer, meditation,  
and service to others,

and helps bring about  
a deeper spirit of unity  
among humankind.





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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Autumn 2010, vol. 61, no. 4

## Fellowship In Prayer, Inc.

291 Witherspoon Street  
Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227

PHONE: 609-924-6863

FAX: 609-924-6910

WEBSITE: [www.fellowshipinprayer.org](http://www.fellowshipinprayer.org)

EMAIL: [editorial@sacredjourney.org](mailto:editorial@sacredjourney.org)

## Executive Director

JANET M. HAAG

## Editorial Projects Manager

LISA M. CLAYTON

## Media Services Specialist

DEEANN WEIR

## Circulation Manager

LINDA D. BAUMANN

## Cover Layout

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# Contents

Autumn 2010, vol. 61, no. 4

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4

A MESSAGE FROM  
FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Minding the Gap

JANET M. HAAG

6

CONFERENCE SERIES I

Drawing Hope: 60 Years of  
Prayer, Spiritual Practice and  
Peacemaking

GUSTAV NIEBUHR

20

ILLUMINATIONS

22

CONFERENCE SERIES II

Contemplation:  
Fanning the Flame

JOAN CHITTISTER

28

A REFLECTION

The Time Traveler

CATHERINE MAKOWSKY

30

Angelic Troublemakers

ROBERT RABBIN

34

POETRY

38

EDITOR MUSINGS

Chichi's Gift

MARY FORD GRABOWSKY

Borrowing God's Eyes

REBECCA LAIRD

"Right Prayer"

LOUISE HUTNER

52

PRAYERS

57

CONFERENCE SERIES III

I/Thou

DAISY KAHN

63

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Peace Prompts

FREDERIC & MARY ANN BRUSSAT

68

ENDPIECE

A World at Prayer

STEWART BITKOFF

# Minding the Gap

JANET M. HAAG

An anniversary is time for remembering humble beginnings, for learning from experience and for beginning anew, for daring to dream. It is the celebration of a journey and everything that is part of it. For 60 years Fellowship In Prayer has been calling people to attentiveness through prayer and spiritual practice, honoring unique experiences of the Sacred as a way to bridge religious differences, recognizing that contemplation is ultimately intended to be Other-centered—leading to acts of compassion in pursuit of justice and peace.

Riders of the London Metro system are repeatedly advised to “mind the gap” when entering or leaving the trains because they face an unsafe breach created when the straight car stops alongside the curved platform. It is essential for travelers to pay attention, to step over the space in order to avoid getting caught in it. This is a perfect metaphor for FIP’s presence and purpose in the world. Our religious differences create distance between us but we don’t have to get stuck in that divide. If we care-fully “mind the gap,” all of us can make our way together to a sustainable future!

In June a vibrant group of individuals committed to interfaith exchange convened in Princeton for Fellowship In Prayer’s Anniversary Conference. It was a celebration of our rich history and an acknowledgement that our work is not yet done. If anything, in our time we have reached another critical crossroads. Deeply held religious convictions are giving rise to controversies that threaten to destroy us. Conference presenters called us to prayer—a prayer that is passionate, alive, engaged—at every level. Their words were intended to fire us up, to inspire and challenge us to action, for the good of the human community, for the good of the earth.

Through the special Conference Series in SACRED JOURNEY, you are being invited to share their insights and ponder how you



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live your prayer. Some prior editors of our journal are also featured in this anniversary issue, highlighting how prayer has made a difference in their lives. If you would like to participate in the conversation—please send us your thoughts and reflections.

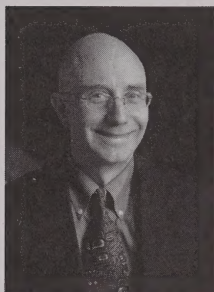
In his sermon during the closing interfaith service, Rev. Jim Forbes declared, “The road to peace is not paved by theological harmonization of ideas, or ritual similarities, but by prayer . . . by members of various faith traditions holding vigil together for a fresh invasion of the spirit.” In this interreligious age, it will mean bringing all of our creativity and energy to bear on “minding the gap.” We will need to set the darkness ablaze with the light of understanding. We will need to warm cold hearts with unrelenting compassion. Then and only then, can we journey forward to realize fullness of life. SJ



Janet M. Haag is the Executive Director of Fellowship In Prayer.

# Drawing Hope: 60 Years of Prayer, Spiritual Practice and Peacemaking

GUSTAV NIEBUHR



*Gustav Niebuhr is associate professor of Religion and the Media at Syracuse University. He is director of the Religion & Society Program and founding director of the Carnegie Religion and Media Program. In 2003 Gustav was scholar-in-residence at Princeton University's Center for the Study of Religion. Previously, he worked as a reporter for The New York Times, The*

*Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal. He is the author of Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America. It was our distinct honor having Gustav Niebuhr present the keynote address at our 2010 conference.*

**I am delighted to be here to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of Fellowship In Prayer.** I mean to be positive and hopeful—seriously hopeful when I speak to *Drawing Hope*. The conference title, *Prayer, an Answer for the 21st Century*, is strong and clear. Prayer is not fashionable; it does not go out of style. It is timeless and its utterance, its performance, its realization is a fundamental part of our experience as humans. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson during his brief ministerial career, "Unceasing endeavors always attend true prayer and by the law of the universe, unceasing endeavors do not fail of their end."

Fellowship In Prayer was founded in the immediate post World War II era, a time of great public fear and global political turmoil. Carl Evans and Kathryn Brown created this organization in a world deeply shaken by the genocide against the Jewish people and the trauma of an international war, in a world mourning more than 60 million people, mostly civilians, who



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had perished in World War II, even as another dangerous international conflict was erupting on the Korean peninsula. It was a world struggling to understand how humans were to live with an extraordinary, indeed unimaginable instrument of mass destruction—the atomic bomb. If we are to reach for a literary label for this time period, it can certainly be found in the Pulitzer Prize winning epic poem *The Age of Anxiety*; written by W. H. Auden.

In the midst of all this turmoil, Fellowship In Prayer's founders articulated a modest proposal—that people come together across religious boundaries to understand and appreciate one another through discovering a common spiritual vision for a world at peace. Evans and Brown can be called interfaith pioneers because in a time when it had yet to become popular they sought to bridge differences rather than ignore them and they reached out to the grass roots, the fundamental source of energy for effective social movements. Their spirit echoes prayer in the Hebrew Bible, "Behold how good and how pleasant for brethren to live together in unity." Sixty years is roughly the equivalent of one productive lifetime and for Fellowship In Prayer, it has been a lifetime of offering hope. The past six decades have been a remarkable era in which Fellowship In Prayer has provided positive human examples of brethren living together in unity.

If we jump ahead to today, the other bookend of this 60-year period, we can easily summon worry—terrorist attacks, nuclear proliferation, wars in South Asia. If we are to look for a literary slogan to describe this time we might choose *Be Very Afraid*, the title of a new book by eminent Princeton sociologist, Robert Wuthnow, a book that is more complex, insightful and ultimately more hopeful than its title alone suggests. It is possible amid the darkest of shadows to be hopeful, without being naïve. It is possible to be purposeful in bearing and proclaiming that hope, in taking it public. We can draw great encouragement from the courageous individuals we encounter when we look back over the past sixty years. Great good has been done in global society by people whose names we now cherish as inspiration, even as

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history has largely forgotten the names of the people who sought to crush them.

Imagine for a moment a man in a jail cell in the United States, arrested on blatantly political charges and placed in a room that had neither a mattress nor linens so he wound up sleeping on steel slats. His jailers denied him writing paper in an effort to silence him because he was a writer. Somehow he obtained a copy of the local newspaper where, to his fascination, he found an open letter addressed directly to him written by the most prominent clergymen in the state. They advised, "Post bail, leave town, don't come back." Inspired by a sense of moral urgency, the man began writing in cramped paragraphs in the margins of that newspaper, drawing arrows to connect his thoughts. It took him days and he relied on a good friend who regularly visited to take his scraps of paper, stuff them down his shirt, and smuggle them out of the jail to be typed into a manuscript that eventually ran twenty pages long. He wrote,

I am in Birmingham, Alabama, because injustice is here. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

His essay carries a compelling universal vision with an elegance of style and eloquent power of a deeply felt and reasoned moral argument.

Still, almost no one paid any attention to it for the first two months after the Southern Christian Leadership Conference released it as a public document. Indeed, one of the clergymen who had written the open letter to Martin Luther King, Jr. read it and threw it away. But two months later, when the news media caught onto it, people began to realize King's letter from a Birmingham jail was a masterful exposition of non-violent but unshakable commitment to a moral cause.

Today this essay is ranked second only to the speech King gave on the Washington Mall. Its text is only a mouse click away

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and when you read it, ask yourself, “Is this a prayer?” Directed ostensibly to “noble citizens,” it reaches across the decades as a truly prophetic appeal for all generations. I doubt any of us can spontaneously name even one of the eight clergymen to whom King addressed his letter. As for the police—they’re largely unknown now. The police chief in Birmingham who so viciously fought against the civil rights demonstrators, well he’s only a name—a name on the wrong side of great social change.

Historians who have studied King tell us it was during a very private moment at the well-documented Montgomery bus boycott that King really rose to prominence as a leader. King awoke early one January morning in 1956 after receiving a threatening phone call. Realizing the demands, expectations and extremist violence that would accrue to him as leader of the movement, King sat at the kitchen table, put his face in his hands and confessed aloud that he was afraid, that he lacked strength for the task ahead. “I’ve come to the point where I can’t face this alone,” he said. This was a prayer—an unconventional one that changed his life. King would later say he heard an inner voice that morning telling him to do what was right and he felt a strength, courage and calm that guided him to the end of his life. A King biographer, Taylor Branch, writes that this moment amounted to King’s, “first transcendent religious experience,” awakening and confirming his belief there is something that opens up mysteriously, something beyond the predicaments of human beings in their frailest or noblest moments. It is remarkable that a moment of prayer decisively confirmed the course of a leader who directly confronted America’s shame.

The idea that “religion is personal, grounded in experience” counts deeply with me. I find in these words two sources of comfort. One is that they closely echo the much longer and very insightful understanding of religion articulated by the Harvard psychologist William James, whose masterpiece *The Varieties of Religious Experience* remains in print a century after he wrote it. Secondly, it takes us far beyond what I regard as the current sterile debate about whether or not God exists. Given all that’s



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published as of late, it seems we've slipped back into the 19th Century when unending zero sum discussions flourished. *God Is Not Great* is one popular book's title; *The God Delusion* is the name of another. *God Is Back* proclaims a third book and yet another reads, *There Is a God*, a title that includes the word "not" crossed out. It's a conversion story in reverse. So, which is it? Is it worth having this discussion? Does it matter? Well, it matters if you sell books. The playwright Christopher Marlowe once wrote that Helen of Troy had the face that launched a thousand ships. In this decade, the question of God's existence is the issue that's launched a million books, maybe many million. And yet what's important in religion—ultimately important—is individual experience—how we perceive the divine and how we respond to it as Martin Luther King did at his kitchen table.

Let's think about a June day one-hundred forty years ago. A young man working a summer job as a shepherd in California's Sierra Nevada opened his diary and wrote he had awakened to another "glorious Sierra day in which we seem to be dissolved and absorbed in pulsing onward we know not where. Life seems neither long nor short and we take no more heed to save time or make haste than do the trees and the stars. This is true freedom. A good practical sort of immortality. Yonder rises another set of white mountains. How sharply the yellow pine spires in palm like crowns of the sugar pines are outlined on its smooth white domes. And hark! The grand thunder billows booming, rolling ridge to ridge followed by the faithful shower." John Muir's lyrical evocation of his experience of nature can be read as a prayer—a prayer written by an outsider to established faith, but a prayer nonetheless. The following day after further exploration, he sat by his campfire and concluded another journal entry. "Precious night, precious day to abide in me forever. Thanks be to God for this immortal gift." Muir went on to publish his journal as *My First Summer in the Sierra*. He founded the Sierra Club and he persuaded Congress to pass national park legislation to preserve Yosemite Valley. As an older man, he took President Theodore Roosevelt on a camping trip there. He was far too busy living his prayers to dip

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into any of the books about whether or not a God exists.

In the six-decade chronology of Fellowship In Prayer's existence we are looking at the power on which we can draw across the lines of faith. A man King met late in his short life who inspired him to speak out against American involvement in the Vietnam War and who, in turn, was touched by King is Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen monk who went from his homeland into exile in 1966. As a journalist, I had the pleasure of meeting him on several occasions. During one of our interviews, the monk recalled meeting King and spoke of how King fit into a *Mahayana* Buddhist framework. "King," Nhat Hanh said, "was a *bodhisattva*, an enlightened being who deliberately seeks rebirth in this troubled world to serve others and free them from suffering." In the July 2010 edition of *Shambhala Sun*, Nhat Hanh describes the practice of mindfulness, a form of meditation that involves focusing deeply on the present. He says, "If you've been hungry, you experience the joy of having something to eat. If you have experienced the suffering of war, you recognize the value of peace." Nhat Hanh has written more than seventy books since he left Vietnam. He lectures throughout the United States and Europe and is a teacher to hundreds of thousands of people globally. Of all the words he has written, a single sentence in a collection of prayers and meditations is the one I would like to share with you, "Let us pray that all living beings realize they are brothers and sisters—all nourished from the same source of life." Does this not echo Psalm 133?

I don't think prayer comes easily, nor is it easy. To be potent, prayer demands humility and vision. Prayer can be dangerous. Consider Dorothy Day, a great American of the 20th Century—a Bohemian who was raised agnostic but would one day convert fully, deeply, radically to Roman Catholicism and go on to found the Catholic Worker Movement, providing shelters and newspapers to the poor. At age 59, she traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, to see the bus boycott for herself. A few days later she went to southern Georgia to visit a place called Koinonia Farm, a sort of utopian agricultural community where black and

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white families lived and worked together in clear violation of the South's segregationist culture. The residents knew many people outside the farm's boundaries hated the place and felt deeply threatened by it. Here is something we must always remember—the bullies, the killers of any era are threatened by peacemakers and fear them. Dorothy Day spent a night sitting watch against possible assailants. In a car parked on the property's edge, Day passed the time reciting from her prayer book. She was praying when a carload of armed men pulled up and opened fire. Their bullets missed. She would later write, "It was what I came for; to share in the fear and suffering." As Emerson preached, "Every desire of the human mind is a prayer uttered to God and registered in heaven." Like King and Nhat Hanh, Day built a thoroughly religious life as an organizer and writer. Like them, she remains widely read and inspirational while those who would have harmed her have faded from memory. Can any of us name the men in that car who tried to kill her?

A friend of mine, an American Muslim, was deeply moved by Day's example. When he was a student at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, he went to visit the Catholic Worker House near campus and was told that if he wanted to know the philosophy behind it all, he should read Dorothy Day. He did and he came away feeling she was speaking directly to him. He was so taken by her emphasis on love as a binding force in community that he wanted to find this force within his own tradition so Islam could play an equal role with other faiths in building community in the United States. My friend, Eboo Patel, has since gone on to found the Interfaith Youth Core, well known on many American college campuses for bringing together young people who are serious about their own religious traditions and getting them to engage in interfaith cooperation for the public good. Happily, Eboo's message has been heard in the highest reaches of our government. He now acts as an advisor to the White House Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Initiatives. A year ago last June, when President Obama was visiting Cairo,



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he delivered a crucial foreign policy address to the world's Muslims in which he said, "Faith should bring us together. This is why we are forging service projects in America that bring together Christians and Muslims and Jews. Around the world we can turn dialog into interfaith service so bridges between people can lead to action. Whether it is combating malaria in Africa or providing relief after a natural disaster." I think Eboo's influence was in Obama's policy statement and I think his words can be considered a prayer for peace.

Now who gets the credit for these prayers and for the deeds that flow from them? I've been citing some people who will be famous far beyond our present century. Here is a contemporary prayer that addresses this very issue,

From the heights of earthly fame I look back in wonder  
at the road which led through hopelessness to this place  
where I can send mankind a reflection of your radiance.  
And whatever in this life I may yet reflect, that you will  
give me. And whatever I shall not attain, that plainly you  
have purposed for others.

I like the final line which suggests divine glory is intended to be widely shared, that many people can reflect it and many do. Who is the author? Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. We remember him mostly for his astonishing resistance to a system of astounding cruelty. He exposed a terrible network of forced labor camps in the former Soviet Union. His native Russia, where he once was imprisoned and persecuted, eventually welcomed him home from exile and bestowed on him its highest honors before his death in 2008. Now to be sure, we will not forget some of the controversial, less constructive things he said in his later years but we still have to acknowledge that he will remain well known, widely read, long after all his persecutors are forgotten.

Widely read—this means accessible to us in words that align. This is what distinguishes the people of whom I have been speaking from destructive folks. Their prayerful words are easily available to us—the letter from a Birmingham jail, Emerson's

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sermon, "Pray without Ceasing," the venerable Thich Nhat Hanh's many books, Dorothy Day's autobiography, the works of John Muir, Eboo Patel's memoir, the list goes on. And this is crucially important because it gives a practical advantage to those who would make peace. This idea comes from a good source and one who cannot be called starry eyed or sentimental. I cite the French writer, Albert Camus who would not be described by most people as a religious man, but some of his writings reveal a profound care for the human being—a tendency that can be regarded as religious. In an essay he wrote after World War II, actually not long before Fellowship In Prayer came into being, Camus looked into the future and predicted that the coming decades would be distinguished by an enormous struggle between those who placed their bets on destruction and those who passionately believed in communication in community.

In coming years an endless struggle will be waged across five continents. A struggle through which either violence or dialog will prevail. Granted the former has a thousand times the chances of the latter. But I've always thought that if the man who places hope in the human condition is a fool then he who gives up hope in the face of circumstances is a coward. Henceforth the only honor in life is obstinately holding to a formidable gamble that words are stronger than bullets.

It's the writing that people leave us that can lead us on, making tangible the hope that inspires us. The ability to communicate is a profound asset, a vital characteristic that distinguishes the heroes of our last sixty years from the ordinary knaves and worse yet, mass killers.

Stalin once contemptuously asked, "How many divisions does the Pope have?" For a man who dealt in raw power and lethal force the answer seemed easy and the lesson obvious—but not so, not so. Stalin did not consider the pope's spiritual and moral authority. He did not imagine Pope John Paul II, elected by his fellow cardinals in 1978, flying home for a pastoral visit to Poland five years later. John Paul paid a public visit to the nation's

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dictator, Wojciech Jaruzelski, an autocrat who was actually seen to tremble in the presence of this man with no divisions. John Paul will be read and discussed for a long time to come. I realize the man is controversial on some counts, but I ask you, who reads Stalin these days and who reads Wojciech Jaruzelski?

Let me sharpen this point further. I lived here in Princeton when the 9/11 attacks took place. I saw the towers burning from the New Jersey Transit train I took to Manhattan that day. It passed through Newark Station at 9:00 a.m. and was, I think, the last train into the city that morning. Two summers ago I read an entire book and a good one on Al-Qaeda, Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower*. However, despite my best efforts, I cannot remember a single statement made by Osama bin Laden. I can call to mind his face but nothing that he has ever said.

There is something to this sense of absence, this imbalance. Earlier I mentioned the British poet W.H. Auden. He was a friend of my Great Aunt's who remembered him with a special fondness and perhaps for that reason I tend to accord great value to his poetry. Among his works he wrote a short piece titled "August 1968" responding to the Russian invasion of the former Czechoslovakia—an event that snuffed out that nation's brief experiment with democracy. But Auden thought big and so the poem is about more than a single event. It's about mortality and what it is that brutality lacks. So here it is,

The ogre does what ogres can.  
Deeds quite impossible for man,  
but one prize is beyond his reach.  
The ogre cannot master speech.

And Auden goes on to say that he imagines the ogre stalking hands on hips on a devastated battlefield where many people lie dead while drivel gushes from his lips. I would say what is remarkable about our time is the number of people who purposefully confront the ogre and survive to write about it.

I'll share with you a couple of personal vignettes from the last two months as I wind this up. The most recent took place



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in Los Angeles in a lush garden that surrounds a large pond just off Sunset Boulevard above the Pacific Ocean. Words like lush garden, large pond aren't ones usually associated with Los Angeles—yet such a place is there. The property is owned by the Self-Realization Fellowship; an organization created by a yoga instructor who came to the United States from India nearly a century ago. The garden is open to all comers and whenever I visit I have the natural impression that people come there to recollect themselves, away from the traffic. It is marvelously quiet and by the way, near its entrance set in stone are symbols of all the world's major religions. In other words, everyone is welcome. There's a surprise too, amid the landscape. When you go to the back of the garden across a short lawn there sits a large urn containing some of Mohandas Gandhi's ashes, and the Fellowship Bookstore sells his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, which is still in print eighty-three years after it was first published. There's much within it that people find helpful, including me when I wrote my book. Gandhi grew up in a household in India that welcomed Jain monks as well as Muslim and Zoroastrian neighbors. His father, a Hindu, enjoyed their company and liked to speak with them about their religions. In his autobiography, Gandhi makes an astute observation about how one might relate one's own faith to that of others. "Tolerance," he says, "may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, and the word respect suggests a sense of patronizing, whereas *ahimsa*,"—and here Gandhi means a study of commitment to nonviolence—"teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter." I can talk at length about this.


Nineteen years after Gandhi's assassination, the American Trappist monk Thomas Merton made a long planned journey to South Asia, sadly, the last such trip he would make. His Asian journal published posthumously contains inevitable references to Gandhi, whose memory was very much alive among the Indians he met. Merton also crossed historical paths with Martin

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Luther King, Jr. who had visited India a decade earlier to learn firsthand Gandhi's methods of nonviolence. In the late 1930s, Merton converted to Catholicism. In 1958 he had a remarkable experience of being in the presence of God's love. I don't know how many of you have been to the spot in downtown Louisville where Merton had his epiphany. It is something to see—an historical marker intended to encompass a great spiritual moment. After his epiphany, Merton became increasingly interested in interreligious dialog and he pursued it through scholarly correspondence with Jews, Buddhists, and Sufi Muslims. When he departed for Asia, he was especially keen on talking with Buddhist monks to know better the similarities and differences in their practices.

If there is a center to his Asian journal, it probably lies in the few days he spent in early November, 1968, in a village in the Himalayan foothills town of Dharamsala. There he entered into three days of intense dialog with a 33-year old monk, an exile from Tibet better known to us as his Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Merton, a prolific writer died in an accident a month later, but their meeting left a profound impression on his Buddhist counterpart. The Dalai Lama has said it was through that meeting that he came to understand and respect Christianity. Since then, of course, the Dalai Lama has traveled extensively and often through the majority Christian world of Europe and North America speaking with political figures, journalists, and academics, but mostly he's come as a teacher. Superficially at least, tens of millions of people know who the Dalai Lama is and would claim to know something about him, but many go deeper because his teachings have been reproduced as books, compact discs and DVDs. His wisdom even appears on t-shirts. You can get a sense of his reach in big bookstores like Barnes and Noble, but to really measure his influence, there's nothing quite like going to visit one of the Tibetan Buddhist publishers now operating in the United States, such as Snow Lion Publications in Ithaca, NY. There hundreds of volumes of his work along with a great deal of visual material are available.

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When Fellowship In Prayer was founded, Tibet, already under pressure from China, would have seemed immensely remote and the richness of its religious traditions confined to a few Western scholars. Thomas Merton, a student at Columbia University in the 1930s, reported finding precious little on Buddhism in that great institution's library. A decade later on a similar quest, the future novelist and Buddhist practitioner, Jack Kerouac, also came up empty-handed. But how marvelously things have changed. Snow Lion, which came into existence in the 1980s, now offers its catalog of Buddhist publications online. I went to their site in May and spent a good hour looking over their stock. Eventually with the help of a friendly staff person I located a book regarded as a fundamental introduction to Tibetan Buddhist spirituality, *For the Benefit of All Beings*. This text offers a series of teachings his Holiness gave to students gathered in the Dordogne in southern France in the 1980s. The Dalai Lama conveyed an invitation to train one's mind for receptivity to the teachings of nonviolence, service, and liberation. His message could well be called a prayer, "Abandon evil-doing. Practice virtue well. Subdue your mind." In repeating his words, I'm struck by two ideas. One, when the Chinese army moved to shut down the independent political religious life of Tibet in 1959, I suspect no one imagined that its primary representative would become an international figure recognized and respected worldwide and that the library of Tibetan teachings would become accessible to hundreds of millions of people. Secondly, none of the transitions I've been talking about happened naturally. Each took enormous work, commitment and dedication on the part of uncounted numbers of people who operated on the principle of hope, of not giving up in the face of utterly daunting odds. As King wrote near the conclusion of his Birmingham letter, "Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes in on the tireless efforts of those willing to be coworkers with God." 





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BUT JUSTICE FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE.

MARTIN LUTHER

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FORGOTTEN THAT WE BELONG TO EACH OTHER.

MOTHER TERESA

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of soul on the wings of words.

ZARATHUSHTRA

WE RECEIVE THE LIGHT, THEN WE IMPART THE LIGHT.  
THUS WE REPAIR THE WORLD.

KABBALAH

So long as mists envelope you, be still; be still until  
the sunlight pours through and dispels the mists—  
as it surely will. Then act with courage.

PONCA CHIEF WHITE EAGLE

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If we want to reap the harvest of peace  
and justice in the future, we will have  
to sow seeds of nonviolence,  
here and now, in the present.

MAIREAD CORRIGAN MAGUIRE

Pray with a sincere and simple heart  
and your prayers will be heard.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

An individual has not started living until  
he or she can rise above the narrow confines  
of his or her individualistic concerns to the  
broader concerns of all humanity.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Nothing could be worse than the fear that one had  
given up too soon and left one unexpended effort that  
might have saved the world.

JANE ADDAMS

PEACE COMES FROM WITHIN. DO NOT SEEK IT WITHOUT.

BUDDHA



# Contemplation: The Fanning of the Flame

JOAN CHITTISTER



*Sr. Joan Chittister has been considered a visionary spiritual voice for more than thirty years. She is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, PA, and Founder and Executive Director of BenetVision. She is an internationally renowned speaker and the author of many books. She is also a regular contributor to the National Catholic Reporter and advocates for peace and social justice around*

*the world. Following are Sr. Joan's inspiring words from Fellowship In Prayer's 60th Anniversary Conference calling us to action: calling us to live what we pray.*

**To those who question the relationship between action and contemplation,** the Monastics of the Egyptian Desert of the 2nd century have an answer. They tell us this story, "Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, 'Abba Joseph, as far as I am able I keep my little fasts, I pray my little prayers, I live in peace, and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do to be holy?' Abba Joseph stood up and stretched his hands toward heaven. His fingers became like ten torches of fire and he said to him, "Why not be turned completely into fire?"

You see, there is a danger in the contemplative life. The danger is that contemplation is often used to justify distance from the great questions of life. Contemplation then becomes an excuse to let the world go to rot. It is a sad understanding of the contemplative life, and, at best, a bogus one. Genuine contemplation is coming to see the world as God sees the world. If contemplation means becoming immersed in the mind of God, the universal soul—the purpose of the universe, then we

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must come to think beyond our own small pious agendas. If contemplation is taking on the heart of God in the heart of the world, then the contemplative, perhaps more than any other, must weep with those who weep.

Contemplation, the search for the Sacred in time, is not for its own sake. To be a contemplative is not to spend life in some kind of spiritual spa designed to save oneself from the down-and-dirty parts of life. It is not spiritual escapism. Contemplation is immersion in the driving force of the universe. It is meant to fill us with the same force, the same mind, the same heart, the same will, the same compassion as that Reservoir from which we draw.

The mystics of every major religious tradition speak to it. "Within the cave of the heart, God dwells," Hinduism tells us. The "Buddha nature is omnipresent, in all places, in all beings, in all things, in all lands," the Buddhist masters say. "Withersoever you turn, there is the Face of God; God is all embracing," Islam teaches. Judaism's psalmists write that God is everywhere, "Where can I go from your spirit—where can I flee from your presence?" And Christianity reminds us always that God's invisible nature is in all creation, "If I dwell in the farthest part of the sea, you are there and your right hand will lay hold of me."

The teachings are clear: God is not contained in any single people, in any one tradition. The contemplative must respond to the divine in everyone and everything. If God wills the care of the poor, as well as the reward of the rich; so must the true contemplative. If God wills the overthrow of the oppressor who stands with a heel in the neck of the weak; so must the real contemplative. If God wills the liberation of human beings; so will the true contemplative. If God desires the full human development of all human beings; thus must the genuine contemplative. Otherwise, contemplation is not real, cannot be real, will never be real. To contemplate the God of justice and compassion requires being committed to justice and compassion ourselves! The true contemplative must speak justice, insist on justice and do justice. Western contemplatives like Thomas Merton, Catherine of Siena,

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Hildegard, Charles de Foucauld, Benedict of Nursia all stood against war, poverty, discrimination and injustice both in the church and state. We must do the same if we claim to be serious about sinking into the heart of God. A spiritual path that does not lead to a living commitment to the coming of the will of God for justice and peace is no path at all.

Contemplation brings us to a state of dangerous openness because it is—by nature—a change in consciousness. We begin to see beyond boundaries, beyond denominations, beyond doctrines, dogmas and institutional self-interest straight into the face of a mothering God from whom all life comes. Contemplation is not ecstasy unlimited; contemplation is enlightenment unbounded by parochialisms, chauvinisms, classisms, racisms, and genderisms. The breath of God the contemplative seeks to breathe is the breath of the spirit of compassion. As we breathe, so must compassion rise. We must weep with those who weep and cry out for those who have no voice.

Transformed from within, the contemplative becomes a new kind of presence in the world, signaling another way of being, of seeing with new eyes and speaking with new words the Word of God. The contemplative can never be a complacent participant in any oppressive system. From contemplation comes not only the consciousness of the universal connectedness of life but the courage to model this connectedness as well.

The prophet Ezekiel tells us, “God is not in the whirlwind.” The contemplative knows God is the whirlwind. God is the energy that drives us, the torch that leads us, the Spirit within that carries us on—beyond every failure, despite every difficulty, so the rising, rising of the Great Compassion rises first in us. To that Energy there is no acceptable, no other possible response, but energy.

Those who have no flame in their hearts for justice, no consciousness of their responsibility to bring forth the reign of God—to build a pure land here—who have no raging commitment to human community, may indeed be seeking God, but make no



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mistake, God is at best only an idea to them—not a Reality.

Contemplation is a very dangerous activity. It not only brings us face-to-face with God. It brings us face-to-face with the world, with ourselves. Nothing stays the same once we have found the God within. We become new people who see everything around us anew. We become connected to everyone, to everything. We carry the world in our hearts: the oppression of peoples, the suffering of nations, the burdens of enemies, the raping of the earth, the hunger of the starving, the joy of every laughing child.

Zeal—translated as “the burning point” in Greek, turns contemplation into reality. But beware! The Rule of Benedict—on which the oldest contemplative order in the West is founded—is clear: “There is a good zeal that leads to life, and a wicked, evil, zeal that leads to death.”

Zeal not grounded in God is a plague of the spirit. It becomes discrimination, genocide, capital punishment, homophobia, sexism, economic colonialism, globalism, and, eventually—nuclear war . . . count on it. Zeal grounded in the self becomes the Inquisition, the Crusades, excommunications, silencings and ethnic cleansings—all in the name of God!

To be truly contemplative we must have zeal for the God of Love, the God of Life in whom all things begin and end. When our spirits are consumed with love for God and with godly compassion for everyone, for everything God has created, there is no clearer sign of genuine contemplation. We can then understand Abba Joseph’s ancient challenge, “Why not be turned completely into fire?” What is the relationship between contemplation and action? Between inner spirit and globalism? It is the same as the relationship between the flame and the fire.

Contemplatives are to be more than flames. As contemplatives, we are to be turned completely into fire. For you, me, for the sake of the world, let us burn on, burn on, burn on! 

## CONNECT—

### Join our Online Community!

Fellowship In Prayer maintains that peace in our world and hope for the future resides in a global community of prayer. When you join our Online Community you will be able to connect with others to share spiritual practices within and across religious traditions as a path to more effective and compassionate social action.

To access the FIP Online Community visit  
[www.fellowshipinprayer.org](http://www.fellowshipinprayer.org)

Using the right navigation bar, click “Join Online Community.” Complete your member profile and you will be able to join an existing prayer circle or create one of your own, participate in One-in-Prayer, comment on our blog, *Step In & Step Up*, check our events calendar, and post your own events.

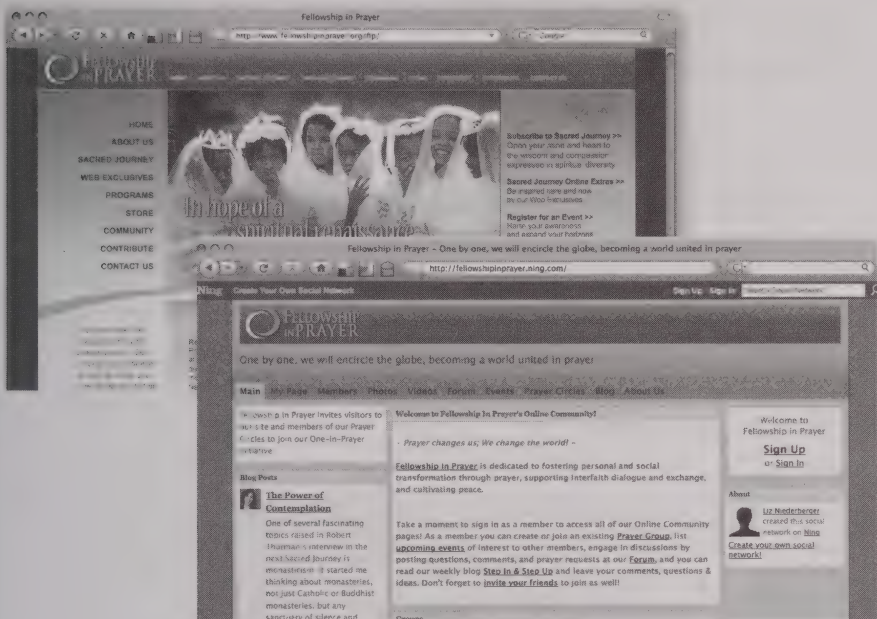
Please be sure to invite your family and friends!

### Become One-In-Prayer!

Check the Fellowship In Prayer home page where a new One-In Prayer request will be posted each week, highlighting a particular social issue or community in need. Every day at noon, wherever you may be in the world, you are invited to pause for one minute of prayer for this special request. We know there is unique power in

collectively focusing our spiritual attention and energy in this way.

To make it even easier for you to participate when you join Fellowship In Prayer's Online Community, you can elect to receive One-in-Prayer weekly email updates.



## Step In & Step Up

*A Blog by Rev. DeeAnn Weir*

Be sure to read Fellowship In Prayer's blog. Join DeeAnn as she reflects on the interface between spiritual practice and deep personal or social transformation and considers the profound wisdom rooted in religious diversity.

DeeAnn shares inspiration gleaned from reading *SACRED JOURNEY*. She speaks from the depth and breadth of her own spiritual practice, and reflects on pressing social issues and—once you join the conversation—your questions and comments.

**Step In** to spiritual awareness and **Step Up** to meet today's challenges!



DEEANN WEIR

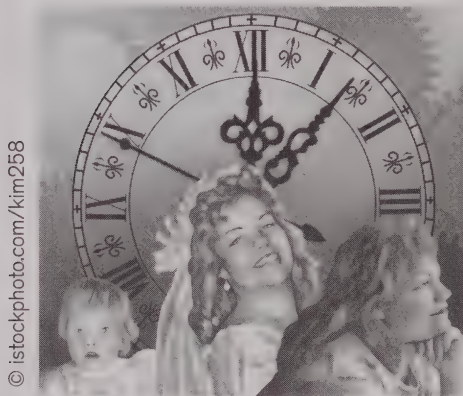


# Time Traveler

CATHERINE MAKOWSKY

Seeing the world through wiser eyes,  
wondering what I would say to you, my younger self,  
if I could travel back through time.

Maybe I would speak about the journeys  
you will take or the experiences  
you will have. Some will be amazing  
and others will break your heart.



As a young woman,  
you are impatient to begin the journey.  
Remember life has prepared you to take  
that leap of faith into the unknown.  
Keep in mind through it all  
you are stronger than you think.

There will be times of loneliness  
and longing for the security of the past.  
In time you will understand that the past  
is only an illusion. Live in the present moment  
with passion.

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Try not to see your experiences  
as merely good or bad, success or failure,  
but as the way life fulfills itself  
with all that is inevitable.

Your journey is more than the pursuit of happiness,  
it is the totality of all your experiences.  
Life is about finding meaning, purpose  
and the depth of who you truly are.

Do not be anxious, for life has a way of forming  
and recreating us, taking us one step beyond  
where we were.

I cannot tell you what to do because  
the answer is already within you, but  
remember to respect your heart's dreams,  
for they will guide you.

And finally I would say, trust in what is deepest  
in yourself, being aware that it is also there in others,  
hidden behind their bravado and laughter,  
just waiting to awaken.

Catherine Makowsky is a writer, poet and photographer. For many years she lived in the desert of southern Texas with a contemplative community, Lebh Shomea. After returning to San Antonio, Catherine completed her studies and received a Master's Degree in Theology. She is the mother of one son, and resides in St. Cloud, MN.

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# Angelic Troublemakers

ROBERT RABBIN

**As we enter 2010 together, I can think of no better theme** than “embodied spiritual action” to help us focus on and commit to demonstrating the highest expression of our common humanity—love, wisdom, and peace—as conscious, consistent choices in all areas of life.

We embrace spiritual principles and practices in order to become free from self-created alienation, suffering, and confusion. We long to experience our wholeness, our connectedness to others and the Earth, our creativity and joy, our authentic being. As we do so, it is important to remember that experience and its expression-as-action are a singular, inseparable movement, and that all manner of personal growth, self development, and higher consciousness ultimately bear fruit in this world, as embodied spiritual action.

Exploring the nature of mind, self, and reality often takes us into higher and subtler planes of existence, where we can lose touch with the physical world and the dramas of everyday life. Many religions and spiritual traditions place spiritual above material, creating a false hierarchy and pitting Soul against World in a struggle for supremacy. This misconception has helped to create the common stereotype of a mystic or sage as an aloof witness to the world. But I have learned the greater purpose of inner spiritual work: to unite spiritual wisdom with compassionate action—in the world. The essence of this view is that wisdom is both insight and action; thus we want to engage life fully and with our whole heart—nourishing self, relationships, work, and world with wisdom, compassion, and

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love through conscious choice and action.

This awakening to the practical implications of “oneness” was a long time coming for me. For the first 20 years or so of my “spiritual” journey, I was addicted to self-transcendence, to a medicated, meditative lifestyle in which I allowed my feeling for the world—my caring and passion and enthusiasm for life and for living—to be numbed by too much witnessing and watching, and not enough acting.

Shortly after the shattering morning of September 11, 2001, a deeper awareness of the connection between spiritual awareness and social participation opened within me. I was horrified at the militaristic responses of America. During the US bombardment of Baghdad, I felt as if the missiles were exploding in my own body. Is this firebombing of a city of 4.5 million people actually happening? Is this carnage and slaughter of a nation half of whose population is under sixteen years of age actually

happening? Suddenly, my every cell awoke to the true meaning of what I had first learned decades ago in India: *tat tvam asi*, Thou Art That. I had first learned that the “that” was a transcendent consciousness, an invitation to take refuge in pure consciousness as my fundamental identity, or nature. But I was discovering that there was a relative dimension to Thou Art That: I am this world, and this world is me. Every spasm of violence, each shattered life and moments of horror were happening inside me. It was not something I could hide from or ignore. My being, my body, had grown as big as the world. I was that supreme, world-transcending consciousness, but I was also the world and everything in it.

I began to write and speak about engaged spirituality, about taking responsibility for the condition of our world and carrying spiritual practice and principles from the meditation halls into the world. I realized that we risk social apathy



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in our search for personal enlightenment if we believe that the goal of spiritual work is to transcend the world. It is not, as these words from Kabbalah suggest: "First we receive the light, then we impart it. Thus we repair the world." Imparting the light requires great things of us: authenticity, honesty, courage, determination, empathy, personal responsibility, and commitment. Repairing the world requires that we add responsibility to realization, caring to love, and action to insight. The task of renewing society to reflect the heart of wisdom requires us to demonstrate our unity-in-love with all creation in all areas of life through direct action. "Every community," said civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, "needs a group of angelic troublemakers."

The philosopher J. Krishnamurti once said, "The crisis is not out there in the world; it is in our own consciousness." It is self-evident that the outer, cultural world in which we live is a direct manifestation

of our inner world of beliefs, attitudes, and values—all of which determine and drive our actions.

Naturally, whatever any one part does touches and affects the whole. Every thought, every word, every slight touch of our hand sends energetic impulses racing outward on the trillions of strands of connective tissue that enfolds us all in the One. Whatever we do to ourselves, we do to each other as each action is a stone thrown into the pond of our common existence. Within minutes, or hours, or days we will feel the ripples of our actions wash over everything. This is why we cannot use war as a tool of peace, because the killing keeps coming back. We have to wage peace, not war. And then peace will keep coming back. Our every thought, word, and action holds the power to create or destroy. In the simplest of terms, our choices are between the paths of war and peace, between violence and nonviolence, between hatred and understanding, between fear

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and love, between retribution and reconciliation, between aggression and restraint.

Our world is begging to be healed of violence, brutality, and greed. Let this be our project. We cannot use our spirituality as an escape hatch from social life and responsibility, nor be afraid to put our spiritual hands into the mulch of committed action for social change. We cannot let national identities, religious dogma, political ideology or spiritual apathy corrupt the knowing of our one heart. Can we rise above the self-created tyrannies

of our times—nationalism, racism, militarism, sexism, corporatism—to establish just societies in which all people, indeed all living creatures and the Earth herself, may live in harmony and peace?

The French novelist Emile Zola once said, “If you ask me why I came to this Earth, I’ll tell you: I came to live out loud.” And we, too, must live out loud, but with wisdom and love and kindness. These are the truths we must embody and send like a cosmic roar throughout the land. Let us start now, right now, this very minute, to heal our world.



Robert Rabbin is a speaker, writer and self-awareness teacher. He is creator and founder of *RealTime Speaking* and *Authenticity Accelerator*. This article originally appeared on Robert Rabbin's website at [www.robertrabbin.com](http://www.robertrabbin.com) and used with permission.

## Preacher: For Joseph Crawford Williamson

CHARLES H. HARPER

*This poem was written in honor of Joe Williamson (1932-2008), a former Trustee of Fellowship In Prayer, for his 70th birthday celebration in 2002. The author, who knew Joe since grade school, uses the Sestina format in which the end-words of every line in verse one appear as end-words in each line of the following five verses, but always in a different order. The final three-line verse incorporates these words again. Each of these key words highlights an important aspect of Joe's ministry.*

A constant theme in what he does is God.

This is not surprising for a preacher  
who aspires to guide his community  
along the paths of rectitude and truth.

His bow also strokes other strings of beauty  
that cause our hearts to lean toward justice

and that elusive peace that only justice  
can secure. Thus is it ordained by God,  
the prophets claim; a vision of beauty  
as astounding that the voice of the preacher  
unremittingly celebrates this truth  
until the folk of the community

embrace this vision, and the community  
is known to be a lover of justice,  
a troupe who dance to the music of truth.  
This view of the church is romantic, God  
knows! But there are moments when the preacher  
glimpses some incarnation of this beauty

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in the people, a luminous beauty  
whose glow the hymns of the community  
extol, its art reflects and the preacher  
rejoices to see. Thus does justice  
call forth art and art turns our hearts to God—  
and the city that is to be, in truth,

is with us now—a little. This huge truth,  
that the city rises now in beauty,  
ravishes our minds and incites us to God  
talk. How else speak of the fair community  
we sometimes see in small acts of justice  
that are enlarged in the lens of the preacher's

preaching until we now hear the preacher  
say that today we can live in this truth  
more fully than yesterday, weaving justice  
into a fabric of such great beauty  
that artists and poets join the community  
in dance and song and praise God.

Thus is the preacher's art a work of beauty,  
a truth within himself and his community  
that, striving for justice, bend toward God.

Charles H. Harper is an ordained minister with the United Church of Christ. His two books of poetry include *Sorting Things Out* and *Making A Life*.



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# Beyond: The Search for God in the 21st Century

RITA MARY PISANO

So...

If all was banged from stardust  
    The creator flung in joy,  
If comet tails are angel wings,  
If Adam was no boy,  
But rather one, small, hairy mother  
    Who birthed a zillion conscious souls  
    Racing on this wild journey,  
Still, the universe unfolds.

Blackest holes implode in mystery  
    Woven into space and time  
    On their trek from singularity  
    And some vast primordial brine.

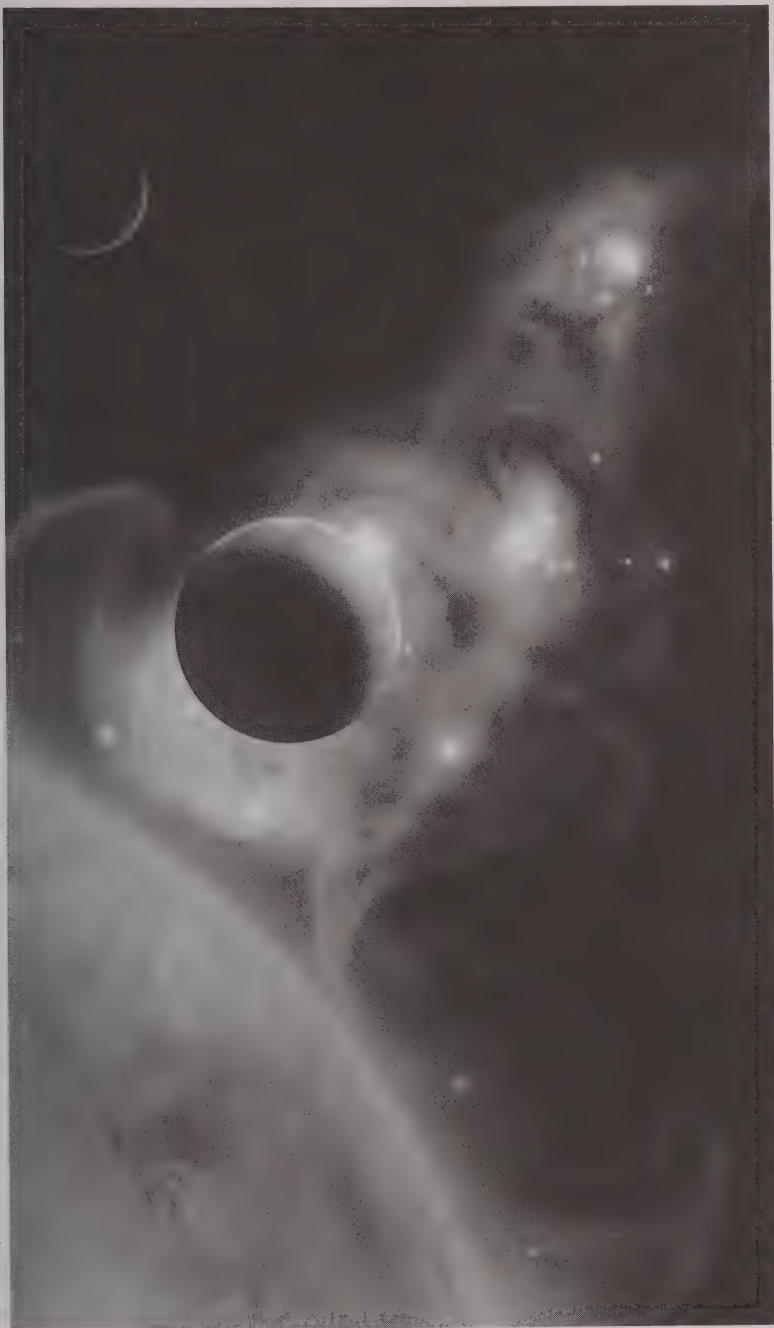
Bytes of love and war foment.  
Brilliant deaths become new worlds,  
And we unfurl...

    But to what end?  
To recompress, then start again?

Or to scatter out so far  
    That touch is dead, and all is dark  
    Without the smallest, pinpoint spark  
    Of hope?

Or, perhaps, while old ghosts grope  
The Source of All has sped ahead  
Preparing worlds beyond our minds,  
    Resplendent rest beyond our times,  
And this is just beyond the cosmic bend!

Rita Pisano is a teacher who shares her love of language and music with her students. Her soul is nourished by her husband of thirty-eight years, her six children, in-laws, and grandchildren. It is through these relationships that she explores, discovers, and embraces God.



## Chichi's Gift

MARY FORD GRABOWSKY

In May, 1994, I flew to Guatemala expecting ten days of joyful sightseeing with my daughter. Tara was spending her last semester before medical school working in a hospital for the poor, and our reunion was jubilant. I hadn't the slightest idea, of course, of the amazing events that lay ahead.

We followed the enthusiastic advice of friends who suggested we rent a jeep and visit a picturesque village called Chichicastenango. A few days later we found ourselves climbing up a narrow, bending dirt road dotted with cavernous potholes and ruts like the jaws of a shark. Our old jeep wheezed and bounced its way up the mountainside and had almost reached the summit when we crashed into an enormous rut. I frantically shifted gears from 1st to reverse to rock the jeep back and forth until finally it bounded out of the hole without plunging down the five hundred-foot-drop a few feet away. We reached the mountaintop a bit shaken but overjoyed to stand on level ground.

A beautiful landscape spread out in front of us. Hundreds of Mayans in immaculate white cotton embroidered in bright red and blue had come together for market day. Near the market, an irresistible path led to a small white Mayan-Catholic church where a very old Mayan *brujo* (healer) was swinging incense over a crippled woman. He was quietly chanting in his native *Quiche* what surely were prayers for healing. When he finished, he walked with an air of infinite humility into the church, where I glimpsed one of the most spiritually charged scenes of my life.

A long line of people who looked very poor and very ill waited for him. The central aisle was carpeted in two or three inches of fresh flower petals and sprinkled with dozens of burning white candles, filling the air with shimmering light. The

whole room was full of love. As the *brujo* began his hauntingly beautiful chants, my daughter and I slipped quietly into the back pew. On a side wall a statue of Mary in Mayan-Christian clothing held my attention with a spiritual presence that seemed to reach out to me personally, and I found myself reciting the “Hail Mary.”

Immediately everything seemed to slow down. I seemed to be swimming in an ocean of love. Without intending to meditate, I sensed myself sink deeper and deeper into beauty, into love and holiness. It was as though I were one with that sacred space. I lost track of time and even of myself.

My daughter touched my hand, whispering that over a half-hour had gone by, and we were overdue to check into our hotel. Still enveloped in love, longing to stay there forever, I tore myself away thinking that nothing, no spiritual or mystical experience, could surpass what I had experienced in this church.





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Early the next morning, we wound our way down the mountain for an appointment with a surgeon who would tell me the fate of my right index finger. In the velvet atmosphere of “Chichi,” I had almost forgotten that the previous week an immense wrought iron door at our hotel had slammed shut on my hand, virtually severing the fingertip. A surgeon had attempted to repair it, but the skin soon turned black and it was clear that the graft was not taking. The doctor had cautioned me to not expect improvement.

On the way to his office, it suddenly occurred to me that grace had been offered to me in the little church of “Chichi” and I had failed to respond to it. I had lost a great opportunity to ask a holy man to pray for me. Moreover, I had not even prayed for myself, for my hand to heal. I wished I had. But before long I realized that the love constellated in that church had drawn me so profoundly into God that it was (for once), impossible to think of myself.

We arrived in the examining room at midday, and as the surgeon unbandaged my hand, his eyes widened with astonishment. “How did you do that?” he said. I gasped as I saw that the skin on my finger was alive and pink again. The wound was healed. Too dazed to respond thoughtfully, I joked: “Oh, I have a great surgeon!” He studied the narrow scar encircling my fingertip, then replied in a hushed voice: “I did not do that. I don’t have that kind of power.”

Now it is 2010, and I still stare at the little scar with amazement. I imagine a miniature halo, like the circles of light medieval artists place over the heads of saints, but this one shines over an unforgettable Mayan *brujo* who was the holiest man I have ever been privileged to meet. His selfless devotion to suffering people led to the spiritual riches I experienced in his church. It is a blessing to wear a scar that reminds me of his light.

My daughter, who has been a doctor for almost a decade, tells me that my healing is not unusual. In the hospital, she has witnessed any number of similar—or much more

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powerful—events that have no medical explanation. Miracles and transformations are taking place every day all around us through the same Divine grace that touched me so powerfully in Chichicastenango. Sadly, these occasions of joy and delight and relief rarely make their way into the media.

Looking back over the years to my experience in Guatemala, I've realized that the beauty, the hope, the holiness suffusing everyone and everything came about through prayer. Not prayer in general, but four distinct forms of prayer. First, the Mayan's selfless prayers for suffering people. Second, the inner prayers of people longing for relief. Their faith was so powerful, so visible in their eyes, that they seemed very close to God.


Third, my spontaneous recitation of a rote prayer from my childhood, the "Hail Mary." Images have often moved me to prayer—a leaping porpoise, for example, or the iridescent reds and oranges of a sunset—but not that of Mary. At the time I did not have a special devotion to her like gardeners who display her statue, but today I believe my unplanned prayer invoking the mother of God contributed to the healing of my hand.

Fourth, what I call "deep prayer," the silent, wordless communion with God often called "meditation" in the East and "contemplation" in the West. I have no doubt that during my own half hour of "deep prayer," Divine energies healed my hand. It has made me more mindful that God works through surprises. There is always the possibility of an amazing interruption that explodes the expected flow of events and plans. For people of faith, there is always newness.

Today, reflecting on that blessed weekend in Guatemala, I feel again the ineffable impact of the old Mayan *brujo* and his sacred devotion to the poor; the warmth of a humble church that was a true house of God; the feminine strength and compassion carved into a statue of Mary; and most of all, love. As part of my work at Fellowship In Prayer, I had the privilege of visiting many holy sites and praying or meditating with deeply spiritual people in over a hundred faith traditions. This

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weekend in Chichicastenango was like the culmination of all that. Eternity broke through the barriers of time, washed away my ego-agendas, and saturated my soul in love.

Because of this experience so long ago, I have come to believe that prayer is the most powerful human act. In the 21st century as in the 20th and all preceding centuries dating back at least to the banks of the Ganges 6,000 years ago, the solution to all problems resides and has always resided in prayer. As I once wrote in *Fellowship In Prayer*, "Prayer transforms individuals, and individuals transform the world." 



Mary Ford Grabowsky served *Fellowship In Prayer* as editor. She is an author and former university teacher. Two of her books, *Sacred Voices: Essential Women's Wisdom Through the Ages* and *Woman Prayers*, were selections on the One Spirit Book Club. Her most recent title is *The Way of Mary: Following Her Footsteps Toward God*. Mary is a highly acclaimed lecturer, radio and television speaker who is featured on the DVD *Hildegard von Bingen in Portrait*, published by the BBC, and her interview with New Dimensions Radio appears on the CD, *Woman of Wisdom*.

Mary holds a Ph.D. in Theology and Spirituality and a Master of Divinity degree, both from Princeton Theological Seminary. She has worked in Latin America, Europe, and on both US coasts. She and her husband now reside in Natick, MA near their daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren.

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# Borrowing God's Eyes

REBECCA LAIRD

**The first decade of the 21st century** has given us much to pray about: terrorism has left much of the world fearful and economic collapse has left most of the world's citizens with fewer resources than before. With these grim realities in mind, two questions have been marinating in my mind and heart: How might we pray if we believed we are already free in God? How might we act out of love if we were no longer afraid?

Two conversation partners, both vital spiritual writers and theologians from the late 20th Century have been my primary mentors and mental conversation partners as I've pondered these questions. The first is the German theologian Dorothee Soelle and the second is the Dutch Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen. Both lived their childhoods in the shadows of World War II and both spent much of their adult energies seeking to understand and bear witness to faithful living through prayer and prophetic action. Both Soelle and Nouwen understood that prayer is often beyond words and only stories will hint at its deeper truths.

## BORROWING GOD'S EYES IN PRAYER

Dorothee Soelle lived her life as a theologian, teacher and prophet knowing the backdrop to her years was Auschwitz. She sought to live in hope without forgetting the sheer horror that good people who lived in her town and nation prayed then did nothing as so many died. No distant God jumped through time and space to save those in the concentration camps. These harsh realities led her to understand prayer as primarily cooperation with God, "the far-near one."

Intercessory prayer she thought allows one to focus on real situations of suffering and need and in doing this we become "connected and accountable" to connect our thoughts and actions with our own "longing for wholeness." She thought that when we pray in this way we "borrow the eyes of God."



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Soelle retells a story from Berthold Brecht's play *Mother Courage* that illustrates what borrowing the eyes of God might look like. The play is set in 1636 during the Thirty Years War that pitted Protestants and Catholics against each other and many emerging nation states against the consolidated interests of Rome. In the play, a young girl named Kattrin who cannot speak is given refuge in a nearby village when she is separated from her mother and must leave her own village. During the play, soldiers lay siege at night to the town where she is a refugee. All of the pious villagers drop to their knees and Kattrin is told "Pray, you poor creature, pray!" As all the others bend to their knees in submission to the

Living out a deeply spiritually nourished life  
leads to a world where each of us  
can live in circles of love.

inevitability of violence unless God brings a miracle from afar, Kattrin slips away to the rooftop of the barn and bangs her drum—boom, boom, boom. The sound of her drumming wakes up the sleeping town and gives them a chance to fight for their lives. For Soelle, Kattrin's active prayer of protest against injustice and impending violence is what intercessory prayer requires. When we seek to pray for the pains and sufferings of the world, we pray, not for an external God to intervene, but for our actions to become connected to the lives of the others we know who are in need.

In this century we can't pray only on our knees; we must pray with our actions to resist suffering and reject harm for the sake of ourselves and our neighbors.

#### THE MOVEMENT FROM FEAR TO LOVE

Henri Nouwen tells another simple story called *The Fearful Hoarders*: "Once there was a group of people who surveyed the resources of the world and said to each other: 'How can we be sure that we have enough in hard times?'" This group begins

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to stockpile food and goods until others begin to protest, "You have much more than you need, while we don't have enough to survive." Those who had direct access to goods became more and more afraid and built higher and higher walls to protect their stockpiles. They built their walls so tall they could not see if there were enemies or friends outside the wall. Instead of feeling secure, those inside with all the wealth became isolated from friend and foe in "the prison they had built with their own fear."

Nouwen knew that fear is a natural and necessary emotion that tells us that something is amiss, but he understood and saw in and around himself the temptation to dwell or make a home in the midst of fear. We can't live in fear; it is a toxic emotion that when left to fester leads to deeper fears rather than increased freedom. In his writing, Nouwen calls people of prayer to move away from the house of fear into the house of love by creating space in our daily lives to be reminded that ultimately we are not what we have or don't have. Neither are we defined by our status or any particular system or social group. Nor are the numbers in our bank accounts connected to our human value. We must keep first things first by creating inner space to let God remind us that we are already free and loved; no amount of brick or mortar or money can reinforce what we already have. Living out a deeply spiritually nourished life that is rooted in God's affirmation and freedom leads to a world where each of us can live in circles of love rather than cower in the concrete corners of fear.

#### MY PERSONAL PRAYERS

This summer I traveled away from my own towers of plenty in Northern New Jersey to visit Malawi. I traveled to this tiny country in southern Africa to see a village well project. An informal collection of friends (old and new) have set out to fund 20 deep water wells in the rural areas of Northern Malawi. Our first day was spent travelling to several villages where bore holes had recently been drilled and pumps put into place. In the first village, we were greeted by the village chiefs and the whirring sound of a generator. This village had organized to build a maize mill near its



new well. Now the women could carry corn to be milled into flour as they drew water. A once-dusty plot of land at the edge of the village was now a center of food, water and community enterprise. At the next village we arrived later than scheduled. Traversing the rutted roads had been challenging. Two community leaders were waiting and one woman leaned against the mud-bricks of a nearby home. The leaders told us that the woman who had stayed to express her thanks had lost her husband and child in the past year to waterborne diseases. She knew how important the well was to the other villagers. It had come too late to save her family but she wanted us to know how grateful she was that others would be spared her suffering. She was a present day Kattrin, drumming her active prayers for the good of others with her presence so that others might have a chance to live.

The last village well we visited was Njuyu where I saw and heard the tall drill rig—boom, boom, boom, boom—as it bored though packed dirt, gravel, and hard rock until it reached mud—the sign that the drill bit had reached the water table more than 50 meters beneath the ground. The long lengths of pipe were soon inserted—boom, boom, boom, boom—and a gravel filtering

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ring poured in. Within days, a photo was sent to me showing the villagers standing around the new pump with overflowing buckets of clean water. That morning I had read some of the words of African-American mystic Howard Thurman before boarding the minibus. He wrote:

God is here in the midst of life, breaking through the commonplace, glorifying the ordinary . . . . One should tread the earth with a deep lying awe and reverence—God is in this place. Do not wait to hear [God’s] spirit winging near in moments of great crisis, do not expect [God] riding on the crest of a wave of deep emotional excitement—do not look to see [God] at the dramatic moment when something abnormal or spectacular is at hand. Rather find [God] in the simple experiences of daily living, in the normal ebb and flow of life as you live it.

That simple moment brought my prayers for the 21st century into view: We must literally and figuratively find ways to link our lives together and bang our collective drums to seek life with all its fullness for ourselves and others as we all drill deeply and drink from the daily groundwater of God’s love—boom, boom, boom. SJ



Rebecca Laird is the Director of Ministerial Formation at Drew University Theological School. She is an ordained minister and trained spiritual director. Rebecca and her husband, Michael Christiansen, collaborated on a recent book; *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* based on the writings of Henri Nouwen and is currently working on a companion volume. Rebecca served Fellowship In Prayer as editor of **SACRED JOURNEY** from 1996-2002 and is presently a trustee.



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# "Right Prayer"

LOUISE HUTNER

**It used to puzzle me** that I could read all sorts of materials over the years, and certain bits would stick—some are still with me now after decades—while the rest just faded away. Why is that?

Why do some words or stories settle in and stay? I've decided that, for me at least, it's because they resonate with my essence, striking some kind of visceral chord that lures me into listening, and feeling, and pondering. . . .

This happened to me with one of the first stories I published as editor of *SACRED JOURNEY*. It was a piece in our February 2004 issue called "Hijacked by Prayer," by Kat Griffith, a Quaker.

Kat writes about a year when she committed to a daily spiritual discipline that included prayer. My one-sentence summary is that she described how her prayer life evolved from self-centered to God-centered.

That sounds so clear and basic, so simple; and it seems so obvious after reading her "punch line." But somehow, I think so very many of us never make it to the punch line. We stay stuck in ego-centered prayer because it's really not clear and simple, and it's a lot of work!

Of course I'll explain Kat's punch line, but before she herself got to it, she had her first experience of being taken over by a prayer, and that turns out to be a key part of God-centered prayer. Here's how she described it:

"Women who've given birth will know what I mean. Once you start pushing, there's no going back. The contraction takes over your entire body. You are nothing but a vehicle for a cosmic push. You go along with it because you no longer have any choice.

"I have prayers like that. They hijack me midstream to someplace else, and take me where they want me to go. I'm so grateful for them—they feel like the moments when I'm closest

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to the Spirit. They're when God says, 'Move over, kiddo; I've got plans for your prayer today.'"

She goes on to talk about her struggles to find the right prayer from one day to the next—what constitutes that kind of prayer, and how she knows when she's found it. She begins by saying:

"I've often been troubled by the 'Ask, and you shall receive' idea. . . . That sort of prayer just hasn't worked for me . . . I've come to believe that learning what to ask for is the real spiritual challenge. I've learned to let my prayers evolve. When a prayer isn't the right one, my heart knows it, and is restless. Usually if I keep trying, I come to the prayer that is the right one. "

Then she gives the example that keeps coming back to me in all kinds of situations, usually because I need to be straightened out and redirected . . . .

Here's the gist of it: Kat was to play in a small, community concert one afternoon. She was anxious, so she prayed to play well. That didn't feel right somehow, so she asked to be satisfied with how she played. That smacked even more of self-absorption, so she added, "Help everyone else to be satisfied too!" That seemed to make it a little better, but not really because it still said, essentially, "God, support my pride!"

She floundered. She tried, "Help me and everyone to enjoy the music." Still not right. Then, finally, the right prayer came to her: "God, please help everyone to hear You in the music, however I play it."

The punch line I mentioned. Doesn't it seem obvious once you hear it?

But to continue . . . then the most amazing and beautiful thing happened: "Instantly, I had a most extraordinary experience: I heard, clear as a bell, the music I was to play that afternoon. It was absolutely perfect, absolutely beautiful, and breathtakingly real. I felt the presence of the Spirit as palpably at that moment as I ever have."

She continues: "I don't know how the audience experienced the music that afternoon, but I played with joy and an unfamiliar sort of confidence. Not confidence that I would play particularly

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well, but a deeper confidence that anyone who opened their heart to the music could hear what I had heard and be moved and brought closer to God by it."

This one little parable has so many facets that grabbed me—her humility, her honesty, her persistence, and her total openness to being guided by God; but the part that has absolutely hijacked me is the letting go of ego, the understanding and acceptance that we're not receptacles for God's gifts. We're instruments. So to speak.

This is how I see prayer's purpose and its power. I'm not in this world to ask for things for myself, or my family, or those who are like me—things that would make me feel good and make me feel safe. That's me as an ego-centered gift recipient. I think I serve a much more genuine and valuable purpose in life if I see myself as an instrument for God.

I think this is really hard to do. It's much more demanding than the recipient version. I can't just sit and wait for Good Things, feeling abandoned if they don't arrive. I have to be open to listening really hard, and to being steered in directions that aren't comfortable, and then to doing what I'm guided to do, which may not be what I want, but it's probably what's right—if I've really listened.

In the 21st century, I believe this is harder to do than it's ever been on this planet. Our world is smaller than ever, given this amazing age of technology and instant connectedness around the globe. We're exposed, just about daily, to people and ideas that make us uncomfortable, or worse, angry, and worse than that, intolerant and close-minded.

Of course, we've always been this way at times. But until this last century, it didn't matter so much. We could avoid crossing paths with those from other faiths and other cultures. Now we can't. We're in each other's countries, and even worse, more and more people are saying—in each others' neighborhoods!

The foreign and the unknown have always made people nervous and afraid. Human nature. But now more than ever

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it matters hugely how we deal with these feelings. In this 21st century, we're faced with this dilemma, and its very big challenge, and there aren't many places to retreat to anymore.

The pessimists' conclusion would probably be that we're headed for nothing but growing conflict, with more widespread, lethal consequences, because people will never be able to accept those whose differences threaten them.

The optimists, I dearly hope, are saying that this is an age of tremendous opportunity and richness. How fabulous to get to know people from other cultures and faith traditions! To learn about their customs and practices, about what inspires them, and so, to be inspired by them. To turn fear into curiosity and welcome.

May the optimists outnumber the pessimists!

I think there's so much to be excited about in this 21st century because I believe that peace, and tolerance, and the richness of diversity can prevail. There's much to fear, but like Kat's ego-centered prayer feeling wrong to her, fear-based living, and all it implies, feels wrong to me.

So how do any of us get to the right prayer?

For me, it's about setting aside ego and fear, and learning to listen—listening to God, however each of us conceives of God, and also listening more than ever to each other, especially to those with different beliefs, and especially when I don't really want to listen and don't like what I hear.

In this 21st century, knowing what to ask for feels more important than ever; and if the request includes any element of exclusivity or intolerance, then it's not the right prayer. SJ



Louise Hutner is a lifelong writer, editor, and photographer. She was the editor of *SACRED JOURNEY* from 2003 till 2007 (and sometime photographer under the pseudonym "Anne Cornwall"). These days she is the Digital Issues Editor for *TIFERET: A Journal of Spiritual Literature*, and happily works on whatever other projects come her way. She is also—and sometimes more importantly—a mother to four and a wife to one. If you'd care to share your comments or writing, you can reach her at [LHutner@gmail.com](mailto:LHutner@gmail.com).



# Spiral Tree of Hope

LOUISE HUTNER

My wish—my prayer—is that we always remember  
that none of us makes our journey alone;  
that sometimes we're the tree,  
and sometimes we're the vine;  
that we may be total strangers—different sizes, different colors;  
but if we embrace each other,  
beautiful things can happen,  
and we can wind our way up to the stars.

Please refer to previous page for biographical information on Louise Hutner.



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# Welcome Guest!

BARBARA ALDRICH

I clean my house  
So that you'll be comfortable  
And so that I won't need to worry  
About worldly things while you are here.  
I clean my windows  
So your view on the world  
Will be clear and unfettered.  
I keep my door unlocked, but guarded,  
So you will be welcome but we both will be safe.  
I play music that our spirits may be lifted  
Above the noises of the world.  
And I sing because my heart tells me to.  
My house is my home.  
It is where I live, and you are welcome.  
My house is me,  
And I am seeking to make it a temple to You  
Where, when you come to it,  
I will want to worship You.

Barbara Aldrich resides in rural Nevada. She is the mother of six children and three stepchildren. Barbara serves as an EMT and publishes an online newsletter for her community. She is a frequent contributor to **SACRED JOURNEY**.

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# May God Bless You

A FRANCISCAN BLESSING

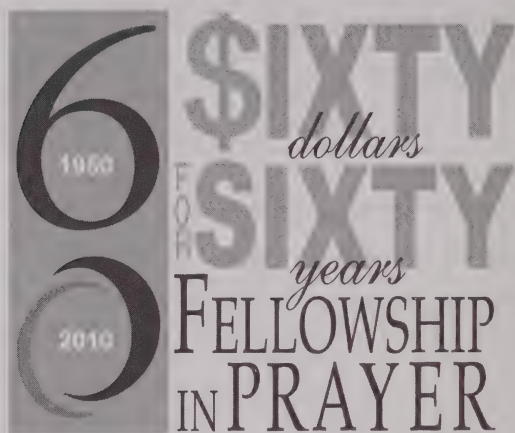
May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers,  
half truths, superficial relationships, so that you will  
live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice,  
oppression and exploitation of people so that you will  
work for justice, equality and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who  
suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that  
you will reach out your hand to comfort them and  
change their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with the foolishness to think  
that you can make a difference in the world, so that  
you will do the things which others tell you cannot be  
done.





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# I/Thou

DAISY KAHN



*Daisy Kahn is Executive Director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), a non-profit organization dedicated to developing an American Muslim identity and to building bridges between the Muslim community and the general public through dialogues in faith, identity, culture and arts. Additionally Ms. Kahn has launched two cutting edge intrafaith programs*

*among the two disempowered majorities of the Muslim world, youth and women; the MLT: Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow and WISE: Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality. At the 60th Anniversary Conference Daisy Kahn made the following heartfelt plea for support and understanding.*

There is no one I would rather speak to than to a group of very dedicated people of conscience. Six weeks ago I probably would have given you a lovely lecture on contemplation in Islam, on Sufism, and prayer, but I am not going to speak about any of those subjects today because, as Sister Joan said earlier, nothing stays the same. I would like now to address a bigger issue and what it means for our country and I have not sat down with anybody to really talk about it until now. I've mostly been interviewed in the media where my story has been reduced to four two-second sound bites.

Let me begin by saying I have spent years in a kind of euphoria, believing the world was my oyster and I could achieve anything because I was living in America where everything is possible. For the last month, however, I am no longer feeling so connected; I am feeling constricted—spiritually, mentally, and perhaps, even physically. It is as though the world is collapsing

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around me. As Zen Master Glassman observed, “our problems stem from people not recognizing one another in each other.” We are caught in an I/thou polarity. I do not recognize myself in you. You do not recognize yourself in me. It can come in any combination; British versus Indian, Arab against Jew, Catholic versus Protestant, Hutu versus Tutsi, white against black, Sunni versus Shiite, Muslim versus Buddhist, Buddhist versus Tamil, ... the list is endless. Our task today at this fellowship where most of us are dedicated to creating a world of unity, and where the world’s great religions are represented, is to demonstrate that religion is not the only cause of conflict although religion is often used as a visible difference between contesting groups. And when conflict does arise in the name of religion, strong voices like ours must characterize the conflict for what it is, and distance religion from it.

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Ethical values are shared  
by all faiths.

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Before I do this I’d like to tell you a little bit about myself. I was born to a Muslim family in Kashmir, India—a paradise on earth. I was sent to Catholic school for eleven years. According to my calculations, I’ve said the Lord’s Prayer more than 3,000 times. I had Hindu teachers; I climbed trees with Sikh girls; and I bought fresh water burros from Buddhists. We were always told that we were from the tenth lost tribe of Israel, and at the age of 15, I landed in Jericho, Long Island, a 99 percent Jewish neighborhood.

Moved by the religious and cultural diversity that characterized my life, I wanted to do something for the benefit of others, but I first went through my own spiritual crisis. I experienced a lost and found period of faith. I actually declared that I was no longer going to be a Muslim, and then went searching for God in all kinds of places. I eventually came across

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a poem that some attribute to Rumi which reads as follows, “I was looking for God and went to a temple but I didn’t find Him there. Then, I went to a church but I didn’t find God there either. Perhaps, He is in the Synagogue I thought, so I checked out the Synagogue but He wasn’t there either.” Since the person who was telling the story was Muslim, he said, “Surely, God must be in the Mosque.” He goes to the Mosque, but doesn’t find God there either. Finally he looks in his own heart and says, “God was there all along.” This marked the moment when the renewal of my faith began. I became enticed and attracted to everything I could learn about my faith, and the more that I learned the more inspired I became to put this knowledge into action.

When 9/11 happened, I was a happy career-oriented woman. A few years earlier, I had married my husband who was an Imam at a mosque twelve blocks from Ground Zero. Americans like you consistently raised three questions about Islam. We spoke at various outreach seminars, including schools, churches, synagogues, and out of all the questions that were asked, three questions always surfaced to the top:

“Why does Islam treat Muslim women as second class citizens?”

“Why don’t your leaders speak out?”

“Why is Islam the most violent religion on earth?”

Of course, we all know scripture can be taken out of context but I began to self-examine and ask, “Is there any truth to what people are saying about my religion? If my faith is strong, why should I be afraid to self-examine?” The Quran says, “The condition of a people will never change unless they change what is in themselves.” Therefore, I have an obligation to look inside myself to see what is it that I need to change in myself to make a difference in my community, in my society.

To respond to these questions, beginning with the one about women in Islam, I launched the global Muslim women’s initiative. We bring together great women luminaries who work tirelessly on the ground as spiritual leaders, activists, scholars, academics, artist—all to create a change within their own communities.



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Secondly, we created the Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow Program that cultivates the next generation of leaders. We need leaders in Muslim communities who will lead the next generation. Instead of focusing our attention on current leadership, we are preparing the next generation of leaders.

Finally, there is the issue of violence. I've dedicated the past ten years to peace projects of unity and harmony and I want nothing more than to create a home for activities that will lead to these, a place where people like you and me can regularly get together and build a practical unity—not just a theoretical one; a place where we can build a future together not only for Muslims but for all Americans; a place for contemplation where we can pray and worship the God whom we call by many names. It was out of this desire that the idea for Cordoba House was conceived. Since we are only ten to twelve blocks from Ground Zero, we cast a wide net. We said we need a bigger space, a bigger venue; one where Muslims can be part of the rebuilding of lower Manhattan, where we can serve and give back to our community, where we could extend our hands to create healing and say, "Here we are." People keep asking Muslims, "Where are your leaders?" And we are answering, "Here we are. We are opening ourselves up to you. We are not in hiding. You do not have to fear us. This center will be an open center; the doors will be open to all of you."

At the beginning of this project, we went to the community board but we didn't even have to go to them. There was no need for it; it's a private project. We aren't getting funding from anyone locally; the government is not funding us but we went to the community board out of the goodness of our hearts because we genuinely wanted to be good neighbors. The fifteen people who were there, all fifteen people unanimously said, "Beautiful project, we love it. We want a swimming pool, a recreation center, a multi-faith chapel, prayer space, food, shopping--think of everything." The space is quite large, it's thirteen stories in a building that was struck by a piece of the plane on 9/11 and it

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has been shut down for nine years. We acquired the space and formulated these grand plans of doing something really good for the community. The day after our meeting with the community board, it was reported by the news media that we were going to build a 13-story mosque at Ground Zero.

I don't know how many of you watch Fox and other media stations, but this has become a tough journey for us. I'm speaking about this because I want us to have a conversation about what this means for all of us. What does it mean for America? And what does it mean for those of us who are trying to do good, who have good intentions but are faced with opposition because of misinformation? We want this center to reveal the commonalities between Islamic values and American values. There are close to six million Muslims in the United States. The only way we can create a harmonious society for the future is to reconcile Islamic values with American values. We want to amplify the ethical values that are shared by all faiths because they are fundamentally the same. We also want to show the pluralism that exists within Islam because this is something most people do not understand. Extremists do not define the agenda for the entire Muslim community. In fact they have hijacked our religion and taken our agenda away from us, not only here in the United States, but globally. So if those of us who are forward thinking, moderate, mainstream, peace loving, if we do not step into the arena of redefining what Muslim life in America is going to be, then who is going to do it? I ask our detractors, why won't you let us do this?

Finally, as we know, all religions have struggled in this country. I don't have to tell you that. Sister Joan, a Catholic nun can probably articulate this better than anyone else. When the Catholics were trying to integrate into American life they had their fair share of difficulties. There was a priest who came to that community board meeting and he said, "You probably don't know this but Saint Patrick's had a fence around it at one time." He continued "And you know why? Because people threatened

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to burn it down.” So other religions have faced their fair share of discrimination. Jews have had a difficult time and now Muslims are going through it. I guarantee other groups that come after us will experience it too.

So what does this mean for those Muslims like us who are trying to integrate into America? How are we going to be allowed into the club? Are we going to be allowed into the club? We need the help of people like you, people of good conscience. Those who oppose us are well-organized and well-funded, and we cannot move forward without your support in achieving the peace we need, peace where peace matters the most. 

# Peace Prompts

FREDERIC AND MARY ANN BRUSSAT

In these tense times, with wars raging in many parts of the world growing larger in the public consciousness every day, we all need to practice peace in as many ways and places as possible. Like actors on the stage, we need a prompter, someone to remind us when we forget our lines what it is we can do internally, locally, and globally. We can think of no better prompter than John Dear, a Jesuit priest who was for many years the Executive Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He is one of the esteemed "Living Spiritual Teachers" with Spirituality & Practice. He is a prolific writer, speaker and protester for peace. In his book *Living Peace: A Spirituality of Contemplation and Action*, John Dear calls us to become peacemakers "within our own broken hearts and broken families, in our bloody city streets and corrupt government offices, in the war zones and refugee camps." We've picked out twelve passages from this book that can be used as "peace prompts."

## BREATHE IN THE SPIRIT OF PEACE

Every morning, I take time to sit in the silence of the present moment, in the peace of God. I breathe in the spirit of peace. I return to the deep inner peace which is the heart of the spiritual life. I imagine sitting beside God. I listen for God's word of peace, that invitation to share in a life of love...In that intimate, sacred peace, I rediscover myself. In that moment, I reclaim my identity as a child of God.

## MAKE PEACE WITH YOURSELF

Peace begins within each of us. It is a process of repeatedly showing mercy to ourselves, forgiving ourselves, befriending ourselves, accepting ourselves, and loving ourselves. As we learn



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to appreciate ourselves and accept God's gift of peace, we begin to radiate peace and love to others.

#### BE ENERGIZED BY OTHER PEACEMAKERS

In my office, large photos of these great witnesses adorn the walls. Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King, Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton keep vigilant watch over me, urging me to persevere in the life of peace. They surround me like the communion of saints made visible...Sitting in the present moment, breathing in the spirit of peace, looking at these messengers, I take up again the mission of peace and nonviolence in a world of war and violence. I feel ready to radiate the spirit of peace everywhere.

#### ENTER THE HEALING PEACE OF SILENCE

As an act of prayer and an act of peace, I recommend that each day we step into silence. That means concretely that we shut the door to our rooms, turn off the TV and the radio and the noise around us, and feel this new quiet. In this silent solitude, we can begin to settle down and quiet the interior sounds and voices that race through our minds. As we slow down interiorly, and become quiet like our surroundings, we enter a healing peace. We close our eyes, concentrate on our gentle breathing, dwell in the spirit of peace, imagine ourselves set in the fullness of peace, and begin to incarnate that vision.

#### LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORDS OF PEACE

If we want to pursue that journey to peace, we need to take a few minutes each day, beginning right this very moment, entering into the silent presence of God and listening for God's gentle, loving voice...Close your eyes, relax, notice your breathing, center yourself, quiet your mind, feel the silence around you, let it come within you, and start listening attentively. Maybe you hear the birds outside or the breeze in the trees. Maybe you hear the rain falling on the roof. Maybe you hear your own breath. But as you

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listen attentively and spend quality time listening deeply, you will over time hear God speak personally to your heart. You will hear the words of peace.

#### LET GO OF YOUR CUMBERSOME BAGGAGE

To settle in to the house of peace, we need to let go of the baggage we carry with us. The God of peace welcomes us at the door, embraces us and invites us inside where we unpack and start a whole new life. Just as solitude, silence, and listening lay the groundwork for the prayer of peace, so letting go of what we cling to enables us to enter God's house and embrace the God of peace.

#### NEVER CONDONE VIOLENCE

We humbly go forward to do the works of peace, to not only stop our complicity in the suffering of humanity but to contribute to the world's nonviolent transformation. Despite the culture's blindness and its insistence that human life can be taken, we will never again condone violence. From now on, we will choose the life of peace.

#### STAND UP PUBLICLY FOR PEACE

A life of peace includes not only the private, inner journey to peace of heart, but a lifelong, public journey to peace for all of humanity. Once we drink from the spiritual source within us, we want to share that gift with everyone. We feel compelled to spend our days offering gifts of peace to all we meet. Peacemaking is not political like electoral campaigns or self-centered ambitions for power, but it does require that we stand up publicly.

#### EXCLUDE NO ONE

As we choose to exclude others and support a culture of exclusion, we tear down the web of our common humanity, erect dividing walls and sow the seeds of war and destruction. People who embrace true peace welcome everyone.

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## REACH OUT TO YOUR ENEMIES

To make peace in our world, we need to reach out to our country's enemies, see them as the sisters and brothers they are, and love and protect them as our own.

## FORGIVE

Forgiveness is an act of faith in God, an act of hope in the future, and an act of love for our neighbors. If we dare forgive, we can trust that God will deepen within and among us the gift of peace.

## BE PART OF A GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF PEACE

The whole world benefits from the peace created in community. Communities touch communities that touch other communities around the world, creating a global community of peace.


Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat have been covering contemporary culture and the spiritual renaissance for four decades. They are the authors of *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*, a collection of more than 650 examples of spiritual perspectives on everyday experience, which is the basis of a 26-part DVD series. Frederic is a UCC clergyman with a journalism ministry and Mary Ann is an interfaith minister ordained by the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary. This article is from the "Spiritual Literacy in Wartime" collection of articles and practices at [www.spiritualityandpractice.com](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com) and reprinted with permission.

# A World at Prayer

STEWART BITKOFF

I just saw a sign that read: 'A World at Prayer is a World at Peace.'  
This sign displayed people from all over the world  
Folding their hands, eyes closed in prayer.

Now, this is a beautiful sentiment and all,  
Folding ones hands and communicating with Deity/Light.  
But while everyone is busy praying,  
Who is delivering pizza?  
Or cutting my grass?  
Or working the emergency rooms?

Seems to me prayer comes in many forms  
Well directed actions are prayers as well. 

Dr. Stewart Bitkoff is an avid student of Sufi mysticism. Specializing in therapeutic recreation, psychiatric rehabilitation, and mental health treatment, he holds a doctorate in education and has served on the faculties of six colleges and universities. He is currently in the process of completing his third book, *Path of the Spiritual Traveler in Everyday Life*. He is a standard contributor to online venues like *Wisdom Magazine*, *New Age Journal* and spiritual blogs. He can be reached at [drbitkoff@yahoo.com](mailto:drbitkoff@yahoo.com).



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